

# Animal & Wildlife Damage Prevention

Mike Bodenchuk  
Federal Program Director



The Animal and Wildlife Damage Prevention Services (AWDPS) program provides a wide variety of assistance to agriculture producers suffering from wildlife caused damage. Additionally, The program alleviates damage caused by one wildlife species on another and assists in the creation of a safe environment for humans in rural and urban Utah.

Predation management is an important function of the program in Utah. Predators kill and injure thousands of sheep and calves annually, and the role of the program is to limit that damage to tolerable levels. Working with the livestock industry and applying sound biological principles, AWDPS has established the objectives of limiting predation losses to less than 5 percent of the lambs protected, less than 3 percent of the adult sheep protected and less than 1 percent of the calves protected.

Using professional principles established by wildlife biologists, AWDPS targets offending individuals and offending population areas to bring down losses. The coyote is the number one predator of calves and lambs, and much of our efforts go towards limiting coyote losses without negatively affecting coyote populations or the role they play in the environment. Because most of the losses to lambs are caused by breeding, territorial coyotes, AWDPS's methods target these animals where losses can be expected.

Cougar and bear damage to sheep and cattle can also be excessive, especially in summer months when livestock are grazed in the mountains of Utah. The program targets these individuals when they have already killed livestock and continue to pose a threat for more depredations. AWDPS cooperates with other agencies in confirming damage caused by these two species for a State sponsored compensation program. It also has assisted livestock producers in implementing proven nonlethal methods to limit depredations and has pioneered research in new ways to prevent losses.

Increasing damage to lambs caused by golden eagles is an emerging issue for the program. Most of the damage is caused by immature eagles which migrate through Utah annually in the spring and fall. On their spring migration, these birds, without the need to return to a nesting territory, will concentrate on lambing pastures in high numbers, generally killing one lamb per eagle per day. Under federal permits, AWDPS is able to live-trap depredating eagles and move them to areas away from lambing herds. These eagles, once moved, resume their migration and do not bother lambs the remainder of the season.

AWDPS also assists other segments of agriculture with the control of invasive starlings at feedlots and dairies. In these situations the birds consume livestock feed reducing cattle weight gains or milk production. Crop farmers also benefit from the program's assistance in reducing damage caused by migratory birds. Increasing numbers of Canada geese and sandhill cranes

impact small grain crops, corn and newly planted alfalfa fields. The program assists farmers with the loan of pyrotechnics and materials designed to scare birds from fields. This past year, AWDPS implemented a supplemental feeding trial to alleviate damage caused by sandhill cranes to newly planted corn. Previously, cranes plucked corn seeds and seedlings from the soil to gain the nutrients in the seed. With the supplemental feeding program, cranes were diverted from the fields with feed corn which averted 95 percent of the damage to the crop.

The protection of human safety is also a paramount concern for AWDPS in Utah. The same skills that allow us to effectively target offending coyotes, cougars and bears are often called into play when an attack on a human occurs. AWDPS assists public safety and other wildlife agencies in investigating human safety complaints, evaluating a correct course of action and, in some cases involving direct attacks, in removing offending predators. AWDPS also operates an Urban Wildlife Damage program in Salt Lake County which assists homeowners and business with wildlife conflicts. The vast majority of these conflicts involve raccoons and skunks which have taken up residence in our urban areas. The program helps prevent untold numbers of rabies, distemper and raccoon roundworm cases. The program also responds to numerous urban waterfowl complaints where salmonella and e. coli bacteria build up in droppings. Waterfowl are often captured and moved to managed wetlands where they can live out the summer without causing damage.

AWDPS also assists the traveling public by working with airports and pilots in minimizing the risks associated with birds at airports. While the possibility of an aircraft/bird strike exists anywhere, these strikes often occur at low levels near airports. AWDPS consults with the airport operators to minimize bird numbers on and near the fields, greatly reducing the threats of a strike.

Predation impacts limit some other valuable species of wildlife. The program conducts protection programs for mule deer and pronghorn when their numbers fall critically short of objectives, for sage grouse when they are particularly vulnerable to predation, and for endangered species to support restoration programs. The need for these activities has increased over the past several years, as more attention is paid to interactions between predators and prey.

Wildlife is a valuable, public-held trust. The Animal and Wildlife Damage Prevention program serves as the interface between the interests of humans for a safe productive environment and the desires to have healthy, productive wildlife populations. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, the program will continue to protect human interests and wildlife populations well into the future.